

**Remarks at a Democratic Senatorial
Campaign Committee Dinner in
Little Rock**

July 18, 1998

Blanche, that was a great talk. And I can't believe you remember that, but it is a true story. After we walked on up the steps—that story you were telling—the Irish Ambassador looked at me kind of funny. I said, "Listen, those guys are from my home State, and I'm absolutely certain they're Irish." [Laughter] So he was fine. [Laughter] People have learned to make allowances for my Arkansas ways in Washington, you know.

I want to thank Senator Pryor for a lot of things, for being my friend—he and Barbara were in the snows of New Hampshire with Hillary and me and our campaign—for many years of service in a stunning, wonderful, decent way, and for coming home and not only not losing interest but actually generating more interest and energy in the future of the children of Arkansas. And we are all very much in his debt that he is doing that, and I thank you, sir.

I want to thank all the officeholders and the candidates who are here. I thank especially Congressman Snyder and Congressman Berry who have been great friends to me and to our administration and to our cause. And I want to ask you all to do everything you can to help Vic Snyder win reelection. He is a truly exceptional human being, and we need more people like him in the Congress.

I ask for your support for Bill Bristow and his running mate, and Judy Smith, and of course, Mark Pryor. Every time I look at Mark Pryor I think, you know, the first time I saw that guy he wasn't old enough to vote. [Laughter] Actually, I'm not sure he knew what voting was the first time I saw him.

But it's wonderful to see all these new people coming in, all this new blood, all these young people coming in. I'm very grateful. But the most important thing of all—I'd like to acknowledge all the relatives of Blanche who are here and the other six people in the audience. [Laughter] You know, I thought I'd done pretty good; I had relatives in 15 counties. She makes me look like a piker. [Laughter]

Actually, it's great to see this election be a family affair, not only for her family members but for all the rest of you. And we've had a good time tonight. I've enjoyed visiting with everybody, and all of you have heard me speak a thousand times anyway, and you probably think that everything that needs to be said has already been said, but not everyone has had the chance to say it yet. But there are a couple of things I would like for you to know.

First of all, I would like for you to know that not everybody in the U.S. Senate is like Dale Bumpers and David Pryor. And I don't mean in terms of party or philosophy. And I see a couple of people nodding their head back there who have to come to Washington and lobby all the time.

I would like for you to know that maybe because we're from here, but for whatever reason, people like Blanche and me, we sort of had this apparently naive idea that if we went to Washington, we'd just sit down with everybody who's interested in solving a problem without regard to their party or where they were from, and we'd figure out how to do it just the way we do at home. We thought that people would always put progress over partisanship. And you can tell by the stories that were told that we believe that politics is about people not power.

We think the Founding Fathers believed that, too, by the way. If you go back and read the Constitution, power is given to people who are in politics temporarily and in limited fashion for the sole purpose of advancing the cause of the rest of the folks that live in this country.

And you know, I went to one of these events in Washington, DC, that the press puts on every year, and it was a kind of a toast and roast, and everyone makes fun of me, so I get to say a few wisecracky things. And I alluded to the fact that some people have criticized Hillary and me for traveling abroad from time to time. And I said that we always liked to go to a new country and that we particularly enjoyed the opportunity to get a visa to come to Washington, DC, and see how a completely different culture lives. [Laughter]

I say that to make a very serious point. There are two reasons you should send

Blanche to the Senate. One is because the ideas and the direction that we and our party now represent are good for America. Two is because we still believe politics is about people not power. We still believe progress should be put over partisanship. And I'll say again, not everybody does.

I'll just give you a couple of examples. First of all, let me say, I'm really grateful to all of you for giving me the chance to serve, for giving me permission to run in '91. And I think that you must be pleased that our country is in the shape it's in, that we do have the lowest—every time you hear something about it, I hope you take some measure of personal pride and ownership when you hear that we have the lowest crime rate in 25 years, the lowest unemployment rate in 28 years, the lowest welfare rolls in 29 years, the first balanced budget and surplus in 29 years, the lowest inflation in 32 years, the highest homeownership in history, and, oh, by the way, the Federal Government is the smallest—under Democrats, not Republicans—the smallest it's been in 35 years.

Now—but we did not do it by posturing, by putting power over people and politics, by elevating partisanship over progress. We did it in just the reverse way. In other words, I have tried to work with like-minded people to get something done in Washington that would elevate the lives of the American people and the future of our children. And I'm telling you, you cannot possibly underestimate the enormous significance of every single seat in the United States Senate, not only for having the right ideas and doing the right things, but for doing it in the right way.

And a lot of you have been kind enough to come up and say, "Well, gosh, Bill, you look like you're having a good time; you look pretty good." I mean, I don't know what you all expected. *[Laughter]* Did you think they'd wheel me in here in a gurney tonight? *[Laughter]* Listen, you prepared me well. This is no big deal. You know what the deal is; I know what the deal is. I'm working for the American people and their future, and we're all fine because we are determined to take this country into the 21st century in a way that befits our heritage and that honors our children.

I want you to think about this. There really are differences here. We don't see the world in the same way as many of the Washington Republicans. I make a big distinction between Republicans that I come across all over America in different walks of life.

I'll just give you one example. We had an incredible event a couple of days ago in Washington to endorse the passage of a very strong Patients' Bill of Rights, because there are more and more Americans who are insured by HMO's, and because they have cost pressures of all kinds, and because increasingly doctors decisions are being overridden or disregarded when it comes to emergency room treatment or specialists or a whole range of other things.

So I appointed this quality medical care commission, had all different kinds of folks on it from all sectors of our health care society including insurers. And they recommended that we have this Patients' Bill of Rights so that people could have some enforceable way of making sure that when it came right down to it, especially in life-threatening conditions, that these health care decisions were made by doctors.

So we said we're going to have a big event about this. Democrats in the House came; Democrats in the Senate came. Two Republicans showed up. And I honor them. But their real problem is they don't act like they're from Washington, DC; they still act like they're, in one case, Long Island; in another case, Iowa.

One of them has a terrible problem: He's a doctor; he knows what the facts are. It's an enormous burden, you know. *[Laughter]* It's hard to live in that nether neverworld if you actually know what the facts are. So here's this Republican doctor up here with a bunch of Democratic Congressmen, and it had been pointed out that when he wasn't in Congress, because he was a physician, he would often go to Central America and help to fix the cleft palates of young children so that they could have normal lives. So this doctor holds up a picture of a young boy with a cleft palate. And everybody gasped in the room because it was so awful. And he said, "The problem is this young man is not from Central America; this young man is from the United States of America, and he was denied

the procedure to fix his face because it was deemed by an accountant to be cosmetic.” Then he held up a picture of the boy with his face fixed, and everybody cheered.

Now, why am I here at this event talking to you about what a Republican Congressman from Iowa said? Because all of us who were Democrats were cheering. Why? Because our country comes first and people come first and progress and moving forward and meeting new challenges come first. But don’t you forget, that happened at a caucus of our party because we’re for that, and they’re not.

We’re for an education agenda that gives us the best elementary and secondary schools in the world because we already have the best colleges and universities in the world. We’re for smaller classes and higher standards and more teachers in the early grades and hooking up every classroom to the Internet and a bunch of other things that they’re not for. They think we’re wrong. I think our ideas are right.

I don’t see how we can ever make America everything it ought to be, I don’t see how we can ever lift up every poor community in this State until we can say with a straight face, “Yes, we’ve had the best university system in the world for a long time; now we have a system of elementary and secondary education that is second to none in the world.” I think we’re right about that.

I went all over the country when I was running for President—indeed, long before—and asked all these police officers, I said, “What’s the most important thing you could do to drive the crime rate down?” And they said two things: Put more police on the street working in the neighborhoods, and give these kids something positive to do to keep them out of trouble in the first place.

Now, we had a few Republicans who voted with us to put 100,000 police on the street, but most of them didn’t. And some of them are still trying to undo it and stop it, today, when we’ve got the lowest crime rate in 25 years. I thank those who are voting with us; but don’t forget, it is our party that fought for this and stands for this, and it helped to give us the lowest crime rate in 25 years. And anybody here who’s ever been a victim of

a crime, there is no more issue—no issue more important.

So I just give you these examples. But to back off—you heard Blanche saying all that stuff about Arkansas values. You know, I used to be embarrassed to talk about that—I’ll be honest with you—because my mother raised me not to be self-promotional in any way like that. But I’m telling you, it’s real. There is a real and profound difference.

There are times when I wake up in our Nation’s Capital, and I deal with people day-in and day-out, and they say one thing one day and then the next day they’re trying to basically say that I’m the worst thing since Joe Stalin. The day before we were all working together, hunky-dory, and I said, “What happened here?” They said, “Oh, they got a different poll last night or something.” [Laughter] And I said, “Hello!”

There is a difference in the parties in Washington, not only in what our ideas are—and I believe ours are better and right, and I think you’ve got evidence of that now, so you don’t have to have a debate about that—but in how we believe people should be treated, what we think it is legitimate to do to try to defeat your enemies, and how we believe we should work with everybody when it comes right down to it, to put the interest of the country first.

I’ll just give you one last example, because it meant a lot to me. Blanche wrote me a letter. When I said we hadn’t had a surplus for 29 years, we quadrupled the debt of the country from 1981 to 1993, and now we’re going to have one—the last thing in the world we need to do is start promising all this money to people in an election year in tax cuts or spending programs until we fix Social Security for the baby boom generation in a way that does not require either the baby boomers, because we’re so large, to be poor when we’re old, or require our children to be poor and our grandchildren to be worse off because they have to spend so much money to take care of us. And Blanche said, “I am for that.”

Now, we see everybody—we see other people in the other party saying, “Oh, I don’t know, we’re going to have a \$60 billion surplus this year. That means it’s going to be a lot bigger over the next few years than I

thought, so let's just go on and pass a big tax cut now"—oh, by the way, just before the election. Well, just because I'm not running again doesn't mean I don't remember what it's like to be just before an election.

But folks, we've been waiting for 29 years to get out of the red. It's not even going to happen officially until October 1st. Don't you think at least we ought to look at the bank balance for a week or two before we start spending it again? *[Applause]*

That's another important thing. She will come home and say, "Look, I know this isn't popular, but I think it's the right thing to do." And, believe me, there are a lot of those decisions that have to be made.

So when you leave here tonight, I want you to leave here with a happy heart and in good spirits. I want you to be proud that your country is in good shape. And I want you to be proud of your personal role in helping me to play the part in that, that I've had the chance to play. I want you to be committed to the proposition that now is not the time to relax and lay back and enjoy it but to bear down and deal with the large questions that are still before us on the edge of a new century.

And I want you to remember why you are here for Blanche Lambert, besides the fact that you either love her or are kin to her. *[Laughter]* There are differences in Washington more profound than the differences out here in the country on the issues, and we now have evidence. We've got a 5½-year record about who's right about these ideas.

And even more important, when the chips are down, there are profound differences in those Arkansas values. We believe in people over power, and progress over partisanship. And believe you me, we need a lot more of that in the United States Congress. Send her there, and she'll make you proud.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:39 p.m. in the Robinson Auditorium at the Robinson Center Exhibition Hall. In his remarks, he referred to former Congresswoman Blanche Lambert Lincoln, candidate for U.S. Senate; former Senator David R. Pryor, his wife, Barbara, and his son, Mark, candidate for State attorney general; Arkansas gubernatorial candidate Bill Bristow; Kurt Dilday, candidate for Lt. Gov.; and Judy Smith,

candidate for Arkansas' Fourth Congressional District.

Remarks to the 75th Annual Convention of the American Federation of Teachers in New Orleans, Louisiana

July 20, 1998

The President. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen of the AFT, Senator Landrieu, Congressman Jefferson, Secretary Slater. Mayor Morial, thank you for hosting this fine group of America's teachers in this wonderful city.

To President Sandy Feldman and Ed McElroy and your newly elected executive VP, Nat Lacour, and all the officers and people who are here. Let me say, when Sandy was up here giving her introduction, my mind was racing back over lots of events going back to early 1992 when we first went to a school in New York together.

Audience member. Cardozo.

The President. Cardozo, that's right; you were there, weren't you? *[Applause]* Now, anytime I'm talking, if I mention something that gives you an opportunity to flack for your school, you stand up and do it. *[Laughter]* I won't be offended. I think you ought to be proud of what you do and where you work and the children that you're trying to help to prepare for tomorrow.

And when you think about where we were then as a nation and where we are now, I was so concerned because not only was the economy in the doldrums, but our society was becoming more divided; the crime rates were going up; the welfare rolls were exploding; there were tensions among our people; people were looking for racial or ethnic or religious or political reasons to blame other people for the general problems and challenges we shared as Americans.

One of the things that I always admired most about the AFT was that I felt that you have always found the right balance between being passionately devoted to public education and to the welfare and working conditions of teachers, and uncompromising—uncompromising—in your advocacy of high